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23 January 1979

DCI CONGRESSIONAL BRIEFING  
Senate Armed Services Committee

KOREAN MILITARY BALANCE

I. Last spring we had good indications that the North Korean ground forces were larger than we had thought up until that time.

A. I directed a major reassessment of the evidence and at the same time we alerted the key Congressional Committees, [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] that we were

in the midst of this reassessment.

II. In point of fact we had been reporting growth in the North Korean armed services for a number of years as this first chart shows.

(GRAPHIC:  
NK military  
strength)

A. The new assessment is still incomplete and there is a wide range of values that has still not been reconciled. DIA, for instance, has accepted to date 29 divisions and four brigades for a total of 33 brigade/division

Korean Mil - 1

ARMY and DIA review(s) completed.

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units; CIA accepts 32 divisions and five brigades; and the Army, 41 divisions and brigades. It may be some time before we can narrow this range.

B. Clearly, this increase of a minimum of four and a maximum of 12 division/brigade units did not take place in the year and one-half since our 1977 estimate.

1. Looking back, we even believe that we can point to late 1969 or 1970 as a time when Kim Il-song made a decision to go for this kind of a build-up.

2. We detected that build-up but we consistently underestimated the rate at which it was proceeding.

*Seventy map*  
*17*  
(GRAPHIC:  
NK-SK com-  
parison)  
*South Korea*  
*1970-78*

C. As these force comparisons show, South Korea has not been standing still. And by looking at the quality of the equipment holdings, the balance is not quite as bleak.

*Why*  
*→*  
*1. Disputes*  
*2. Core VI*  
*Whuman*  
*3. Mangson*

Korean Mil - 2

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*by the  
NK-SK  
Comparison*

1. It is clear, however, that the military balance is less favorable to South Korea today than it has been in the past and than we thought it was last year.

III. The question is why have the North Koreans chosen to put about 4 percent of their population in military service and spend about 20 percent of their GNP on their military establishment.



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- A. One hypothesis is that they are simply strengthening their defensive position.
  1. In point of fact this seems unlikely because the training we have seen has offensive orientation, there have been large increases in river crossing equipment, and they continue tunneling under the DMZ and conducting armed infiltration into South Korea.
  2. This map shows where the new divisions are located--back from the DMZ, but

(GRAPHIC:  
NK division  
locator)

clearly not oriented toward the North.

B. Another hypothesis would be that they are attempting to obtain political leverage. If, as we think, the build-up began about 1969 or 1970, it was just after the Pueblo incident and the EC-121 incident when Kim Il-song raised tensions but perhaps realized he didn't have much muscle to use.

C. Still another hypothesis, or course, has to be that the North Koreans are building up for a deliberate attack. We cannot reject this out of hand with the available evidence.

IV. What does this mean for the US troop withdrawal?

A. Clearly our policy-makers must consider many factors other than my intelligence input. That input, however, does say that North Korean military capability has grown dramatically since 1970.

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- B. Furthermore, as I said earlier, it is more favorable to North Korea now than it was or than we thought it was 18 months ago.
- C. Nevertheless, peace has been maintained and Kim cannot ignore broader international developments such as the improvement in US-Chinese relations. Indeed, normalization of US relations with China may be one factor that prompted the recent North Korean proposal for talks between Seoul and Pyongyang. We do not yet know if the talks will take place or if the talks may be still another tactical move in the competition between the two Koreas. But we will be closely watching this development for insights into North Korean intentions.

Korean Mil - 5

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Sino-Soviet

I. It is to the Sino-Soviet relationship I would like now to turn because much of what each nation does in the outside world can be explained in terms of the rivalry and tense relations between them.

II. Beijing's (Peking's) current anti-Soviet strategy is keyed to the strengthening of political and economic relationships with the West--particularly with the US--and with Japan. They have reason to be satisfied with developments in the past year.

- 7
- A. Both the US and Japan agreed to language the Soviets consider anti-Soviet in joint documents issued in connection with the normalization of Sino-US diplomatic relations last month and the conclusion of the Sino-Japanese Peace and Friendship Treaty last October.
- B. Chairman Hua Guofeng's (Hua Kuo-feng) visits to Yugoslavia and Romania last fall demonstrated Beijing's willingness and capability to take on the Soviets in their own backyard.

- C. The Chinese have significantly improved their trade ties with Western Europe and Japan, and are on the verge of their first, modest arms purchases abroad.
- D. These developments strengthen Beijing's image as a normal, stable country, and demonstrate China's determination to deal effectively with the Soviets on a world-wide basis.

III. Moscow is, of course, concerned that China's new ties with Western countries and Japan lessen its interest in accommodation with the USSR and significantly enhance the prospect that China will in time become a modern, militarily strong adversary.

- A. The latter is especially worrisome and the Soviets are already warning West European leaders that the sale of weapons to China will damage their relations with Moscow.
  - 1. The West Germans have taken Moscow's objections into account, but France and, perhaps, the UK are close to concluding weapons sales to China.

B. The Soviets had long expected the normalization of Sino-US ties but they were probably surprised and upset by the timing--coming as it did close to the conclusion of their own SALT negotiations with the US.

1. They have tried to avoid undue anxiety, which might encourage US "China card" players; at the same time, they have not wished to appear so indifferent as to make Soviet considerations count for less in US deliberations on China policy.

IV. Sino-US normalization is likely to prompt the Soviets to intensify policies that they have already put into effect to counter China's more activist policies and their perception of Sino-US collusion against the USSR.

A. Moscow probably will redouble efforts to prevent India from drifting toward China. Indian Foreign Minister Vajpayee plans to visit China next month amid reports that both sides are interested in resolving their long-standing border dispute.

B. The Soviets may try to mend fences with North Korea, although Kim Il-song's relations with Beijing have become increasingly close in recent years.



- C. They will probably also soon begin trying to improve relations with the Japanese.
- D. Moscow certainly will step up the pressure on Romania in an effort to improve discipline and unity among its East European allies.
- E. While they will doubtless continue to exert pressure on the West Europeans to desist from arms sales to China, the Soviets are hampered somewhat by their competing desire to build relationships with West European countries that will offset what they see as China's inroads in the region.
- F. They see their commitment to Vietnam as more important to them than ever. With the signing of the USSR-Vietnam friendship treaty last November, the Soviets are in a position to react strongly to any Chinese threats against Hanoi.
- V. The volatile situation in Indochina has the seeds for a significant heightening of Sino-Soviet tensions.

- Why releasing?
- A. Since the end of the Vietnam war in 1975, Chinese efforts to block Vietnamese expansion in Indochina, which China treats as closely tied to Moscow's own "hegemonistic" and anti-China policies, have helped push Hanoi deeper into the arms of the Soviets.
  - B. A wide range of disputes, now public, underscore the bitterness of Sino-Vietnamese tensions. These include disagreements over the land border between the two countries, conflicting claims to the waters and islands in the South China Sea, and a sharp quarrel over Hanoi's treatment of the ethnic Chinese population in Vietnam.
  - C. Most important, however, has been China's support of the Pol Pot regime in Kampuchea, which China has long seen as a counter to the growth of Vietnamese--and, implicitly, Soviet--influence in the region.
  - D. While it is still too early to tell whether or not a viable, anti-Vietnam resistance will be maintained in Kampuchea, the collapse of the Pol Pot regime weakens China's credibility as a Southeast Asian power. Apprehension is bound to grow in other Southeast Asian capitals--especially Bangkok--about Vietnamese intentions and Beijing's ability to counter them.

- E. As a result, the Chinese may feel compelled to "punish" Hanoi and to demonstrate that their failure to protect Pol Pot does not translate into impotence elsewhere. This could come in the form of a sharp military confrontation along the Sino-Vietnamese border.
- VI. Chinese concern about possible Soviet countermeasures must be factored into any Chinese decision on when and how to "punish" the Vietnamese.
  - A. We would expect the Soviets' initial reaction to increased Chinese military pressure on Vietnam to include demonstrations of support in the Indochina theater; for instance, an airlift of military supplies, a visit by a Soviet naval contingent, or well-publicized consultations.
  - B. The Soviets might later begin a campaign of intimidation along the Sino-Soviet border-- including demonstrative military air and ground patrolling, military maneuvers and, ultimately, some sort of limited military provocation.

VII. The high military and political costs and risks of a major military attack against China, as well as uncertain benefits, make such an attack highly improbable.

A. A large-scale conventional campaign would require a huge expenditure of forces and could promise neither conclusive military results nor political payoffs.

B. A nuclear attack on China would have a greater potential for conclusive results, but it would carry incalculable risks--Chinese nuclear retaliation and a radical destabilization of the global strategic environment.

VIII. We have seen no militarily significant changes in the force posture of either side along the Sino-Soviet border since the invasion of Kampuchea.

Gradual force improvements, however, continue.

A. The Soviets currently have some 500,000 troops in the border region.

1. Most of their <sup>4</sup>4~~2~~ divisions are understrength, but by calling up reservists, divisions closest to population centers could be brought up to combat strength in a few days.

2. The Soviet divisions are mostly motorized rifle divisions and have over 120,000 tanks,
- B. The Chinese have 1.7 million troops along the Soviet border, and outnumber Soviet forces by more than three-to-one, but Soviet units have substantial advantages in firepower and mobility.
  1. Most of China's 98 divisions are infantry. Virtually all of them are fully manned and equipped; most are located well back from the border.
  2. China's forces are best prepared to fight a nonnuclear defensive war; China would probably use nuclear armed missiles only in retaliation because of the overwhelming Soviet advantage in tactical nuclear weapons.
- C. The Soviets probably could achieve local air superiority. They have far superior and better armed aircraft and the most effective array of air defense weapons in the world.
- D. While Soviet nuclear superiority over China has increased since 1969, so has China's retaliatory capability. China has about 70 strategic missiles capable of reaching Soviet targets. Most are stored in caves or remote

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- A. The Chinese have long been closer political allies of North Korean President Kim Il-song than have the Soviets; in the past year or so they have also replaced the Soviets as Kim's principal source for material assistance.
- B. China's recent moves to normalize its relations with both Japan and the US are <sup>not</sup> entirely welcome in Pyongyang, but the visits last year by Hua Guofeng and Deng Xiaoping -- and the assurances they presumably provided -- helped to alleviate some of Pyongyang's apprehensions.
- C. Kim Il-song has long sought to exploit the mutual antagonism between China and the USSR, and he undoubtedly will make some effort to restore a more balanced relationship with the two communist powers.
- D. Although the Soviets have made limited overtures toward Kim Il-song, they have not demonstrated any great desire to compete more vigorously for Kim's favor.

I. Indochina

A. Kampucheans continue stiff resistance in countryside

MAP

1. Hold provincial capital of Takeo; fighting near Battambang; KohKong island now in VN hands, but VN ships under attack
2. VN re-supply effort hampered--roads trenched, bridges destroyed.
3. Quick VN thrust took major towns and roads but did not destroy Kampuchean forces. Pol Pot believed operating near Battambang.
4. Thais concerned, but wish to stay out.

B. China/Vietnam

China/VN  
border  
map

1. Major combat elements of 41st, 42nd and 55th armies moved to border
2. Combat a/c in area increased from 400 to 600 (half of MIG-21 force)

- 
4. Both sides report "armed incursions"
  5. High state of alert

C. Heightened Soviet interest--Brezhnev's early return from Bulgaria on 19 Jan?

S/S border  
map/OB





4. Soviet press over weekend carried Western reports of Chinese build-up on VN border; accused Chinese of "armed provocations"
5. Soviet options: (under Treaty of Friendship)
  - consultations
  - conspicuous military aid
  - naval show of force
  - demonstrative show of force on S/S border  
(Chinese forces well back from border)
6. Balance in North (Sino-Soviet border)
  - Soviets - 43 divisions (500,000 men)
  - Chinese - 98 divisions (1,700,000 men)
  - Soviets - 12,000 tanks
  - Chinese - 4,500 tanks
  - No changes in deployment
  - Risks high

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